

June 25, 2007

Dear Governor Huntsman and Mayor Corroon:

The Refugee Working Group is pleased to present, for your consideration, a Summary of Recommendations for improving and enhancing Utah's refugee resettlement system.

On October 12, 2006, you chartered the Refugee Working Group to review Utah's current refugee resettlement system, the system's gaps and strengths, and recommend possible solutions or enhancements to the system. Since October 2006, the Refugee Working Group has met every month, except during the legislative session in February, to fulfill its mission and charter.

Participants in the Refugee Working Group include leaders of refugee ethnic associations and refugees themselves, State agency executive directors or department designees, local city and county government agency directors and leaders, a broad spectrum of community based organizations, faith-based organizations, and refugee service providers.

Palmer DePaulis, Executive Director of the Department of Community and Culture, facilitated and guided the Refugee Working Group through the problem solving process. The process included brainstorming sessions to identify a myriad of issues, problems, and service gaps ranging from public awareness of refugees to the structure and management of the refugee resettlement system. These service gaps were distilled into common themes and major areas of concern, i.e. core values, accountability, language barriers, case management, employment and self-sufficiency, community development and preservation, youth services, housing, and health issues. The Refugee Working Group then identified a number of possible solutions to address these identified areas of concern. These recommendations were reorganized under the major headings and are being presented to you for your initial review.

Two aspects of this process are of special note. First, the attendance of the Refugee Working Group meetings varied from forty to sixty-five people. In order to accommodate the working schedules of many refugees, meetings were held in the evenings or on weekends. Second, the Refugee Working Group strove to reach general consensus on the identified gaps in services and the list of proposed recommendations. The significance of reaching consensus is important given that the Refugee Working Group membership was diverse and held, at times, opposing points of view.

There were several overarching issues identified by the Refugee Working Group that deserve special mention. First, Utah needs a more effective structure for coordinating refugee services. Second, the refugee resettlement system is not adequately funded. Private, state, and other public funding must be sought to supplement federal refugee program funding. Third, Utah needs to increase accountability for refugee services through increased oversight and involvement of refugee community leaders in the decision-making process. Lastly, Utah must increase the capacity of refugee ethnic organizations to provide services in their own communities while reducing the burden on government.

The Refugee Working Group also identified an immediate need relating to the severe shortage of affordable and appropriate housing for refugee families. The Refugee Working Group recognizes this is not solely a refugee issue, but part of a larger issue regarding the availability of affordable and adequate housing, particularly in larger housing unit sizes, for all of Utah's low-income families. New refugee families are more severely impacted by the current housing crisis, since it may take up to a year or more to rise to the top of the subsidized or public housing lists, only to find there are no available three or four bedroom units to rent. While waiting for subsidized or public housing, the new refugee families are paying full rent. This is a tremendous financial burden on new refugee families.

Please consider this an interim report of the Refugee Working Group and a first step toward improving Utah's refugee resettlement system. The Refugee Working Group has recommended a smaller representative group continue to meet over the next month to produce a document that outlines long and short-term goals and a potential road map for you to follow. Next steps may include a long-term strategic plan, reallocating existing resources, providing new resources, and developing plans to increase the refugee community's capacity to handle many of the refugee issues themselves.

Thank you for the opportunity to make recommendations and for your willingness to make changes within the Refugee Resettlement Program in order to aid and assist refugees become full participants in Utah's community.

Respectfully,

Palmer DePaulis
Huntsman-Corroon Refugee Working Group, Facilitator
Executive Director Department of Community and Culture

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